

Evaluation of Fife's Community Kitchen Executive Summary February 2012

Introduction

- 1.1 In May 2010, the Levenmouth Community Kitchen opened at Adam Smith College's campus in Leven. The Community Kitchen is led and funded by NHS Fife and is run in partnership with Adam Smith College, Fife Council and Fife Community Food Project.
- 1.2 The overriding aim of the Community Kitchen is *"to improve the skills and knowledge of vulnerable groups in Fife by providing groups of participants with an opportunity to cook together simple healthy meals made from raw ingredients, thus enabling and empowering them to make informed choices about the food they buy and eat"*¹. A range of partner organisations use the Community Kitchen to deliver healthy eating classes to their service users.
- 1.3 In November 2011, NHS Fife commissioned Blake Stevenson to evaluate the impact of the Community Kitchen and to explore issues around the future development and sustainability of the Kitchen.
- 1.4 Our evaluation found that the Community Kitchen has been successful in promoting healthy eating among members of the community, and is a valuable resource in supporting partner organisations in their work to promote healthy eating among service users.
- 1.5 This document summarises the findings of our evaluation, based on the results of interviews with 21 stakeholders, three focus groups with members of the public who have participated in classes at the Community Kitchen and a survey of 64 participants in Community Kitchen classes.

Impact on participants' healthy eating skills and behaviour

- 1.6 Our evaluation found that attending classes at the Community Kitchen has a positive impact on participants in terms of: improved **awareness and knowledge** of healthy eating issues; improved **skills and experience** related to healthy eating; and improved **confidence** in cooking healthy meals; improved **diet, health and wellbeing**; and other, non-diet-related benefits for participants.
- 1.7 By increasing participants' awareness, knowledge, skills, experience and confidence related to healthy eating and cooking, the Community Kitchen gives participants the know-how and ability to prepare and eat healthy food, and helps to remove barriers associated with eating healthily. Although this does not *always* translate into actual improvements in

¹ Clark, Lyndsay (2011), *Fife Community Kitchen Leven*, NHS Fife

eating habits, our evidence indicates that, more often than not, it does. 64% of survey respondents reported having an improved diet after attending the Community Kitchen, and focus group participants gave several examples of improving their diets, which largely consisted of processed ready and microwaveable meals before they attended the Community Kitchen. Stakeholders noted reduced reliance on ready meals and increased willingness to try preparing healthy meals among their service users. As one stakeholder said, the Community Kitchen helps people to *“believe in themselves – they are able to make their own food rather than buying ready meals”*.

1.8 Improving their eating habits has several positive knock-on effects on participants’ wider health and wellbeing including:

- feeling more healthy in general;
- improvements in weight management;
- increased confidence;
- increased ability to manage long-term health conditions;
- an increase in energy; and
- the ability to take part in more sport and physical activity.

1.9 It is important to acknowledge that the Community Kitchen may not be the only influence that prompts improvements in participants’ diets, but all survey respondents, barring one, said the Community Kitchen had at least some impact on their eating habits, along with other influences such as family and friends, doctors and other health professionals, and teachers and lecturers.

Other impacts on participants

1.10 We found that there are other, non-diet-related benefits of attending the Community Kitchen for participants, as discussed below.

1.11 Participants who attended classes at the Community Kitchen reported several other, non-diet related, benefits. Most notably, going to the Community Kitchen promotes **life and employability skills**. 80% of survey respondents said they had learned new skills from the Community Kitchen, 31% said it had helped them get into education or training and 20% said it had helped them find a job. Stakeholders identified several examples of participants who had become comfortable and familiar with the college environment as a result of going to the Community Kitchen and had since enrolled in college courses. Other benefits for participants include: the opportunity to **socialise** and meet new people; and **improved confidence**.

Impact on organisations and staff

- 1.12 Stakeholders reported that the Community Kitchen makes it a lot easier to run healthy eating sessions with service users. Although there are other community venues with cooking facilities that can be used to deliver healthy eating sessions, the Community Kitchen “*makes it a lot easier*” because of its size, accessible location and the equipment, storage space and supplies it has available. This is particularly true for Food Development Workers and Sessional Workers from Fife Community Food Project, who previously had to carry a large amount of supplies and equipment between venues with them.
- 1.13 Similarly, Fife Community Food Project has used the Community Kitchen to deliver a train the trainer training sessions to build the capacity of staff from partner organisations to independently deliver healthy eating sessions with their service users. This has further increased the ability of partner organisations to provide healthy eating sessions for their service users.
- 1.14 This is an important point, because although it is the facilitators of the healthy eating sessions delivered in the Community Kitchen, rather than the Community Kitchen itself, that provide participants with the skills and knowledge to eat healthily; the value of the Community Kitchen lies in making the delivery of these sessions possible. Several stakeholders commented that the Community Kitchen makes it far easier to run healthy eating sessions, and many others said that it would not be possible to run healthy eating sessions at all if the Community Kitchen did not exist.

Areas for consideration

- 1.15 Our evaluation revealed very few weaknesses associated with the Community Kitchen. However, there are a few areas for consideration when planning the future of the Community Kitchen.
- **Location of participants:** it appears that the vast majority of participants who attend the Community Kitchen come from the Levenmouth area.
 - *We recommend that the managing partners (NHS Fife, Adam Smith College and Fife Community Food Project) investigate the reasons why people from other areas of Fife have not accessed the Community Kitchen.*
 - **Areas for improvement:** Participants and stakeholders identified a few areas for improving the Community Kitchen including: extending the length of sessions and programmes; extending opening times to include evenings and weekends; increasing the capacity of the Community Kitchen; and promoting the availability of orientation sessions for partner organisations before they use the Kitchen.
 - *We recommend that the managing partners consider how these suggested improvements could be implemented.*

- **Monitoring data:** We estimate that approximately 600 people have participated in healthy eating sessions at the Community Kitchen since it opened in May 2010. However, this is an estimate because: there is no formal system for collecting, storing and analysing data on participant numbers or participant profile data such as age, gender, location and so on; and partner organisations currently vary in the extent to which they record monitoring data.
 - *We recommend that the managing partners implement a robust monitoring system to accurately record how many people access the Community Kitchen and to analyse the types of client groups that use the Community Kitchen.*
- **Reaching target groups:** The Community Kitchen’s main target groups are young families, teen parents, homeless people and low income groups. The findings of our evaluation suggest that the Kitchen is reaching low income groups, young families and teen parents, but more could be done to target homeless people.
 - *We recommend that the managing partners explore how they could increase participation in the Community Kitchen among homeless people and other under-represented groups such as older people.*
- **Evaluation:** Fife Community Food Project distributes and collects evaluation data from Community Kitchen participants. This provides some important evidence of the impact of the Community Kitchen on participants but our evaluation has identified a need to refine and augment existing evaluation processes.
 - *We recommend that the managing partners review the evaluation system linked to the Community Kitchen and make any necessary amendments to ensure that evidence of the impact of the Community Kitchen on participants and partner organisations is gathered.*
- **Income generation:** The Community Kitchen is available for use free of charge to partner organisations and service users from the 20% most deprived SIMD neighbourhoods. It charges a fee for other use of the Community Kitchen and aims to use 25% of its time for income-generating work and 75% as non-income generating activity. However, although the Community Kitchen has successfully run three sessions of an income-generating ‘Kids in the Kitchen’ course, it appears that there has been less income-generating activity than expected and this aim has not been achieved.
 - *We recommend that the managing partners consider any income-generating activities that could be delivered at the Community Kitchen as a priority, with the aim of making the Community Kitchen as self-sustaining as possible.*
- **Sustaining impact:** Fife Community Food Project currently has an important role in raising awareness of the Community Kitchen and in organising and delivering

healthy eating sessions at the Community Kitchen. However, the Project has recently experienced a significant reduction in its funding and this will restrict the volume of work it can carry out.

- *We recommend that managing partners:*
 - *assess the demand for further train the trainer and deliver further sessions if there is demand. This will help to build the capacity of partner organisations to deliver healthy eating sessions themselves and will help to sustain the impact of the Community Kitchen given Fife Community Food Project’s reduced capacity;*
 - *develop a plan to specify who will take over the roles of Fife Community Food Project where necessary, particularly in terms of promoting the Community Kitchen, organising and delivering classes; and*
 - *promote greater use of the Community Kitchen by further raising awareness of the Community Kitchen among partner organisations.*

The Future of the Community Kitchen

- 1.16 We have identified two options for the future development of the Community Kitchen concept in Fife.

Option 1: Retain existing Levenmouth Community Kitchen and increase the catchment area

- 1.17 This option would involve retaining the existing Community Kitchen in Levenmouth but developing it further by, for example:

- implementing more income generating activity to make the Community Kitchen more self-sustaining and reducing reliance on grant funding and support in kind from NHS Fife, Fife Community Food Project and Adam Smith College;
- directing resources to provide transport for people from other areas of Fife to access the Kitchen; and
- further raising awareness of the Kitchen among public and voluntary sector organisations in Fife.

Option 2: Retain existing Levenmouth Community Kitchen and develop additional Community Kitchen(s) in other areas

- 1.18 This option would involve retaining the existing Community Kitchen and implementing more income generating activity at this facility, as well as developing additional Community Kitchen(s) elsewhere in Fife.
- 1.19 Developing additional Community Kitchens would be costly, whether it involves building new facilities or refurbishing existing community facilities, in terms of capital required for building/refurbishment work, and in terms of staff time and costs required to develop and run the new Kitchen(s). Although income generated from the existing Kitchen could contribute towards these costs, it is likely that at least some grant funding will be required to fund the development of the additional Kitchen(s).
- 1.20 However, developing additional Kitchen(s) could produce greater return on investment, given the increased numbers of people that will be able to access a Community Kitchen and gain the associated benefits such as increased awareness and skills related to healthy eating. It would also increase the volume of income generating activity by providing another base for delivering charged-for activities.
- 1.21 *We recommend that the managing partners consider the options for further developing the existing Community Kitchen and the possibility of developing additional Community Kitchen(s) elsewhere in Fife. We suggest that there are various issues to consider when making this decision including the following.*
- *There would be significant financial implications of developing additional Community Kitchen(s): in the current financial climate, it might be more feasible to invest any additional resources in transporting service users from other areas of Fife to Leven rather than develop new Community Kitchens.*
 - *Balanced against this, however, is the possibility that service users may be less likely to attend the Community Kitchen if they need to travel outside their home town to get to it, even if the transport is paid for them.*
 - *If additional Kitchens are developed, should these be built from scratch or based in existing facilities which require refurbishment or re-development?*

Concluding remarks

- 1.22 This evaluation has demonstrated that the Community Kitchen has had a considerable and positive impact on participants and partner organisations. NHS Fife, Fife Community Food Project and Adam Smith College deserve great credit for their work to develop and run the Community Kitchen, which is very highly regarded by stakeholders.
- 1.23 This evaluation has identified several areas for consideration when planning the future of the Community Kitchen and the potential development of further Community Kitchens elsewhere in Fife. NHS Fife and its partners must consider these carefully in order to determine the optimal way to maintain and increase the impact of the Community Kitchen concept in Fife.